

## Japanese Martial Arts in Britain

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To KAWANARI

In the first place I am going to introduce you to Japanese martial arts.

Generally speaking Japanese martial arts are fortunately known almost all over the world, but in their capacities as sports matches and combat sports or sports activities. For example Judo is one event at the Olympic Games, and Sumo matches can be watched on TV in Britain and Germany, but these are only the very famous Sumo wrestler's matches such as the three highest ranks, or Sanyaku and the grand champion, or Yokozuna.

In spite of the evident fact that Karate, or Karatedo originated in China and has been divided into many schools in Japan which we call "ryu", Karate is recognized as the most famous Japanese martial arts. Kendo, or traditional Japanese bamboo fencing is also known considerably. By the way the 4th Kendo World Championship of this year was held in April in Tokyo, and the Japanese team gained the world championship.

Anyway it is a great delight that Japanese material arts have spread to such an extent as I have just explained.

However I should like to tell you a few words about a special term which is used in Britain and Spain that I happened to see very recently. It is the term Bujitsu.

The term Bujitsu is one that I have scarcely seen and heard in Japan except in the movies and stories, which describe the archaic times, from the late 12 century onwards, and by the late 19 century. The term Bujitsu was used as a general term to express various warrior's arts rather than martial arts. The number of its schools was said to amount to about 9000.

In the Edo era which continued for about two hundred and sixty years, there were many feudal domains controlled by the local war lords, or Daimiyos. They had their own special Bujitsu kept in strict secrecy in order to defend their territories from other war lords.

After the Edo era, in the Tokugawa Shogun's place the Meiji Empera ruled Japan. The Meiji new government wanted to build a modern westernized nation which was concentrated and powerful. From the point of view of the Meiji Government, the above-mentioned Bujitsu was regarded as being no longer valid and representative of the former and old-fashioned and barbaric times. And furthermore the introduction of firearms had radically changed the role of Bujitsu. Due to this situation the traditional Bujitsu was enforced to experience many hardships and then doomed to decline and disappear.

Before long Budo, or what we know as Japanese martial arts were born, Bujitsu has its

own long history, in other words, Bujitsu is said to be one of the ancestor of Budo.

As for the term Bujitsu, strange to say, nowadays the term Bujitsu is used in China. But in case of China, I think the use of the term has its own reason. One of the greatest Chinese philosophers Leo-tse was said to insist strongly 'the way cannot or should not be discussed,' so in China they may use the term Bujitsu to express Chinese martial arts. I guess they don't like to use the term way, or "do" in Japanese especially expressing the martial arts in Japan.

Well as I told you, I have seen the term Bujitsu used in Britain and Spain. In Cambridge I noticed posters recruiting new members in several colleges, and observed their Bujitsu practice. It was just as I imaged from the illustrated posters. Somehow British style Bujitsu might be very similar to the old Judo which was called Jujitsu, because they did not use arms like the wooden knife and sword or so. But in Spain as they used the arms their Bujitsu was very similar to the archaic Bujitsu which I used to watch in the movies.

Anyway I should recognized that both in Britain and Spain they have the old terminology as well as the old form of Japanese martial arts.

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However though Japanese martial arts had already disappeared, why British style Bujitsu still alive? Though I am far from concluding it, I can certainly assert that their Bujitsu had had a deep relation with Jujitsu introduced to Britain in the late 19 century. For example, according to the magazine *The Japan Society* (Vol. 1., 1893)<sup>1</sup>, Tetsujiro Shidach who was a famous Jujitsu instructor from Tokyo read the Lecture on "Ju-jitsu, the Ancient Art of Self-Defence by Sleight of Body" at the Inaugural Meeting of the Japan Society, and after his lecture he gave practical demonstrations in evening dress with Daigoro Goh who was secretary of the Japan Society. Shidachi's lecture and their Jujitsu demonstrations were treated as a topic in many presses and magazines, especially the most notable comment was an article entitle "Ju-jitsu" in *The Saturday Review*<sup>2</sup> of May 7th, 1892.

And in 1918, the Budokuwai was founded in London under the leadership of Gunji Koizumi and Yukio Tani<sup>3</sup> who were both 3rd dan of black belt. Its purpose was to train Jujitsu and Kendo, and foster the spirit of Bushido, its members were about 150,

including 11 British who were all 1st dan of black belt.

That's why Jujitsu had hooted in Britain, and during about one century, I think it might have mixed Bujitsu.

Anyway for most Japanese it is very difficult to make a clear distinction between Jujitsu and Bujitsu, because as I told you we have no such a actual model of martial arts any longer.

Now I fear I have indulged in too much nomenclature, so I intend to mention on Japanese martial arts in Britain.



By the way it is well known that Sherlock Holmes practiced Japanese martial arts. For example, after two years disappearance Holmes suddenly showed up in front of Dr. Watson, and explained. '... When I reached the end I stood at bay. He drew no weapon, but he rushed at me and threw his long arms around me. He knew that his own game was up, and was only anxious to revenge himself upon me. We tottered together upon the brink of the fall. I have some knowledge, however, of *baritsu*, or the Japanese system of wrestling, which has more than once been very useful to me. I slipped through his grip, and he with a horrible scream kicked madly for a few seconds and clawed the air with both his hands. But for all his efforts he could not get his balance, and over he went. With my face over the brink I saw him fall for a long way. Then he struck a rock, bounded off and splashed into the water.'<sup>4</sup>

But what is *baritsu*? Fortunately we have two Japanese translated versions of it. One is Japanese martial arts<sup>5</sup>, another is Jujitsu.<sup>6</sup>

As for *baritsu*, I would like to introduce, an interesting episode. Against Shidachi's Jujitsu's lecture on the "Ju-jitsu" an English gentleman whose name was E. W. Barton-Wright refuted. Barton-Wright had investigated Jujitsu and invented his own martial art and named it as *Bar-titsu*. Under *Bar-titsu*, he comprised 'boxing, or the use of the fist as a hitting medium, the use of the feet both in an offensive and defensive sense, the use of the walking-stick as a means of self-defence in such a way as to make it practically impossible to be hit upon the fingers.'<sup>7</sup> According to Barton-Wright, 'Ju-do and Ju-jitsu were not designed as primary means of attack and defence against a boxer or a man who kicks you, but were only supported to be used after coming to close quarters, and in

order to get to close quarters it was absolutely necessary to understand boxing and the use of foot. Ju-do and Ju-jitsu, however, were very reliable means of self-defence against Japanese and all foreigners who did not understand the scientific use of the fist or foot.’<sup>8</sup>

*Bar-titsu* seemed to be more practical and aggressive than Japanese martial arts in respect of self-defence, because they first and foremost use their own stick against the enemy. It is easy to guess that *bar-titsu* might have spread among gentlemen in Britain. But *bar-titsu* was very difficult for the English to pronounce, so I guess the middle of spell ‘t’ might be dropped, *bar-titsu* became *baritsu*.

In my opinion, Arthur Conan Doyle must have adopted, and used the term, not *bar-titsu*, but *baritsu* as self-defence martial art. Nowadays I don’t know whether *baritsu* is in common use or not, because I have never seen it.

But I can’t help wondering why Bujitsu or old Japanese martial art or Japanese worror’s art which had disappeared about one hundred and thirty year ago in Japan are now active in Britain.

#### Notes

\* This lecture was read at the Forth Chiba - Warwick Symposium in the University of Warwick in England on 1 September 1994.

1. Tetsujiro Shidach; “Ju-jitsu, The Ancient Art of Self-Defence by Sleight of Body” *The Japan Society*, vol. 1., London, 1893, pp. 4-21.

2. *The Saturday Review* (May 7th, 1892)

“Ju-jitsu, the Ancient Art of Self-Defence by Sleight of Body,” was the subject chosen for the lecture at the “Inaugural Meeting of the Japan Society” last week. It was possibly in deference to the tastes of an athletic people that Mr. T. Shidachi, LL. B., of Tokio, was asked to lecture on this comparatively unintellectual subject in the not very congenial atmosphere of the hall of the Society of Arts. Mr. Shidachi explained that he had translated “Ju-jitsu” as the “Art of Self-Defence by Sleight of Body,” or even as “Art of Gaining the Victory by Yielding,” because by these phrases, which he candidly allowed are of the nature of circumlocutions, can alone be given the full force of Ju-jitsu. After seeing his practical demonstrations, we can, however, assure Mr. Shidachi that the good old English word “wrestling” translates it to perfection. These practical demonstrations were the more agreeable because Mr. Shidachi and his friend,

Mr. Daigoro Goh, who arose and played for the instruction of the audience, were in evening dress, which gave a new charm to the throws. Mr. Daigoro Goh, who explained with much humour that he was ignorant of Ju-jitsu, and that he sacrificed himself for the good of the Society, of which he is secretary, was fated to be always thrown. He performed his part with a smiling good humour, and a total absence of anything like self-consciousness, which were beyond praise. An Englishman could hardly have escaped looking more or less awkward, whereas nothing disturbed either the self-possession or the shirt front of Mr. Daigoro Goh. As for the wrestling, better has been seen at the Japanese Village, among other places, and also worse. Mr. Shidachi is, we have no doubt, a fair amateur wrestler, and quite a match for a European of his weight. As a lecturer he was mistaken in thinking that there is anything new to us, or even very Oriental, in Ju-jitsu, unless it be this - that the art of wrestling in Japan includes strangling, and recovering persons who have not been strangled too much. The wrestling throws were common enough. One which Mr. Shidachi seemed to think particularly Japanese he called "straight body throwing." It consists in putting your foot against the "abdomen" of an opponent with whom you are engaged in the common arm grip, and then throwing yourself violently back on the ground. The trick - for it is no more - is well known to European wrestlers of - to be frank - a low stamp. Tried against a very raw and slow antagonist, it might end in your tossing your enemy over your head, to the imminent peril of this neck, Mr. Daigoro Goh. But against a third-rate West-country wrestler who was on the watch, it would most assuredly end in the "straight throwing" of the body of the wrong person. From Mr. Shidachi's lecture we gathered with some difficulty - for though his English was idiomatic, his tongue would too frequently revolt patriotically back to a pronunciation which we take it was Japanese - that Ju-jitsu has a good deal of history. There are schools, and they have secrets which are only revealed to "the perfect" under the sanction of blood-curdling oaths. Mr. Shidachi hinted that the secrets are mostly bosh, written in a style which is barely intelligible - wherein, on general principles, we think he must be right. The prevailing school seems to have been formed by the alliance of two famous families of hereditary wrestling masters. It seems - we speak again with reserve and as under correction - to include a general athletic training in gymnastics, swimming, &c., the "sleight of body" being only taught when the body had been well trained. We have heard of much more foolish systems than this, and we hope that the school of Mr. Shindachi's honoured

master will long flourish.”

3. Noboru Koyama; “The Japaneses in London - People and Organizations before the World War II” *Libellus*, no. 7, (December 1992), Kashiwa Shobou.
4. Arthur Connan Doyle, *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*, Penguin Books, p. 13.
5. Tokyo Sogen Sha (translated by Tomoji Abe) p. 17.
6. Shincho Sha (translated by Ken Nobehara) p. 15.
7. E. W. Barton-Wright; “Ju-jitsu and Ju-do”, *The Japan Society*, vol. V., London, 1902, p. 261.
8. *Ibid.*